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Letter dated 17 October 2013 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you a letter from the representative of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces dated 17 October 2013 in advance of the Security Council's debate on "Women and peace and security" to be held on 18 October 2013 (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could have the present letter and the annex thereto circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Peter **Wilson**

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Annex to the letter dated 17 October 2013 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, I have the honour to refer to the Security Council's open debate on "Women and peace and security" to be held on 18 October 2013.

As confirmed in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), all United Nations Member States have a duty to "implement fully international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls during and after conflict". This builds on the essential rights enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the view expressed by the 2005 World Summit that all States "have the duty to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms" (see General Assembly resolution 60/1).

For the past two and a half years, the Syrian regime has failed to meet these international obligations, in particular the protection of the rights of women and girls. Instead, it has engaged in a widespread and systematic campaign of sexual violence against Syria's civilian population, while denying United Nations investigators access to the Syrian Arab Republic in an attempt to conceal the full extent of its human rights abuses.

Despite the regime's lack of cooperation, monitors have been able to collect and present credible evidence to document the scale of abuses carried out by regime-sponsored forces in Syria. The United Nations has provided proof of extensive acts of sexual violence committed by regime forces and its affiliated militias. These include rape, abuse, torture and sexual humiliation against innocent civilians.

In its latest report, issued in August 2013, the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic found that "The threat of rape is used as a tool to terrorize and punish women, men and children perceived as being associated with the opposition" (see A/HRC/24/46). In addition to coercing confessions through the threat of gang rape, pro-government elements were found to have committed sexual violence, including rape, during raids in Dara'a, Hamah and Tartus.

In April 2013, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura, requested that the Security Council take action to stop the violence in Syria. After testifying to the widespread existence of rape and torture across Syria, Special Representative Bangura urged "President Assad in the strongest terms to ensure that all persons in government custody are treated humanely in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law".

In February 2013, the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, in its interim report to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, confirmed numerous cases of sexual violence committed by government forces and affiliated militia. This included the use of sexual violence in the targeting of family members of opposition fighters, and the rape of women and girls during house

searches and at checkpoints as well as in detention centres (see A/HRC/22/59 and Corr.1).

The actions of the Syrian regime are prosecutable as war crimes, and they violate international law as articulated in Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1960 (2010). In all cases, the Security Council has condemned the use of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, and called upon parties to make and implement specific commitments on timely investigations of alleged abuses in order to hold perpetrators accountable.

The membership of the United Nations has also expressed repeatedly its concern at the Syrian regime's abuses. In February 2012, the General Assembly condemned "the continued widespread and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities, such as the use of force against civilians ... torture, sexual violence, and ill-treatment, including against children" (see General Assembly resolution 66/253 A).

In May 2013, the General Assembly condemned "all violations of international humanitarian law and the continued widespread and systematic gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities and the Government-affiliated *shabbiha* militia", including the use of "systematic sexual violence, including rape in detention, and ill-treatment, including against children" (see General Assembly resolution 67/262).

The Syrian regime has repeatedly ignored all efforts by the international community calling for it to end its grave violations of the Syrian people's human rights. Its use of sexual violence is in clear contravention of international law, and contributes to the growing body of evidence that the Syrian regime has forfeited its right to represent the Syrian people.

The Syrian Coalition respectfully requests that the Security Council use its forthcoming debate to denounce the Syrian regime's systematic and widespread use of sexual violence as an instrument of war. We further ask that the Security Council call upon the Syrian regime to allow independent investigators immediate and unfettered access throughout the Syrian Arab Republic so that evidence can be gathered to ensure that all perpetrators of these crimes are held accountable.

Ultimately, the only way to end the violence and stop the suffering of the Syrian people is to establish a transitional Government that can administer Syria's path to democracy. The Syrian Coalition therefore urges the Security Council to use all means at its disposal as provided for in the United Nations Charter, to bring pressure to bear on the Assad regime to start our country's transition to democracy.

The Syrian Coalition reaffirms its own commitment to protecting the rights of women and its support for all measures that can prohibit sexual violence in conflict and ensure accountability for individuals that violate international law in this regard.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
United Nations Representative of the Syrian Coalition